

# Response to Commission Requests from the Meetings of Nov. 19/20, 2015

## UBEROI FOUNDATION INSTITUTE FOR CURRICULUM ADVANCEMENT

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(page and line numbers from Oct. 8 version of draft Framework narrative, att1c6-8hss)

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**Introduction:** During the IQC meetings of November 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Co-Chair Bill Honig asked for input on two issues: position of women in Hindu history and historical attempts at reformation of the caste system. In this document, we will respond with our specific suggestions on these two issues. We will also provide further commentary on patriarchy and caste/social status, mostly in response to testimony given by the youth at the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting.

We are not repeating arguments made in our earlier submission when dealing with the same or similar edits, but offering new information on the issue.

### 1. p. 214 lines 883-887 on patriarchy

**Existing Text:** “~~Although ancient India was a patriarchy,~~ women had a right to their personal wealth, especially jewelry, gold, and silver, but fewer property rights than men. They participated equally with their husbands in religious ceremonies and festival celebrations. Hinduism is the only major religion in which God is worshipped in female as well as male form.”

**Uberoi Recommendation:** “In ancient India women had a right...”

Justification: Aside from our earlier request for this same edit, we now have additional evidence. First is the suggested edit to this line from the Faculty Review letter submitted 11/18 by Kamala Visweswaran which acknowledges that patriarchy was common to “other ancient kingdoms and societies.” However, reference to patriarchy is not consistent across all cultures and countries. Contrary to the Commission’s own understanding expressed at the meeting, patriarchy is mentioned only specifically in reference to two other cultures: ancient Babylon and

Islam. It is this disparate treatment of Hinduism, which is glaringly apparent in the classroom, that the youth are complaining about in their testimony.

There is no statement one way or the other on the rights of women under Judaism in the present narrative. The narrative on Christianity and women is actually misleading as to the position of women in the religion, as it makes no mention of their rights or their expected submission to men. Page 245, lines 280 to 283, currently read: *“The church communities welcomed new converts without consideration of their political or social standing, including the urban poor and women. Upper class and influential Romans who converted appear to have been predominantly women, and some of them assumed leadership positions.”*

In the absence of any accurate statement about the rights of women in Judaism or Christianity, our Hindu youth (as well as the Muslim youth) are unfairly put on the defensive in a situation where the majority of their classmates are likely to be Christian. By making some seem inferior due to their race, sex, color or creed we are not only violating Education Code sections 51501 and 60044 but also failing to provide our students with an equal footing to learn and succeed in school and beyond.

One way to be fair would be to make parallel statements in the narrative on women’s right for Judaism and Christianity.

A hypothetical entry on Christianity might read:

*“Although ancient Christianity was a patriarchy and all the apostles were men, several women were prominent, most especially Mary, mother of Jesus. Until modern times, Christian women could not legally own property or make contracts. Women were expected to be subordinate to men, for example the New Testament, Ephesians 5:22-24, states, ‘Wives, submit to your own husbands.’ The Apostle Paul states in Corinthians 14:33-35, ‘As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.’”*

Practically speaking, we realize inserting an edit on patriarchy and the rights of women in Christianity or Judaism would involve a lot of discussion, hence our simple solution of just removing “Although ancient India was a patriarchy...” This small deletion solves the problem.

## **2. Added after lines 883-887, p. 214 on notable women in Hinduism for 6<sup>th</sup> grade**

**“Students learn about Parvati, Saraswati, Lakshmi and other Goddesses and how They are regarded as ‘Shakti,’ or Divine power, in Hindu philosophy. Students also learn about great Hindu women of the time such as the ancient philosophers Gargi Vachaknavi and Maitreyi, both contributors to the Rig Veda, as well as female protagonists in the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, including Sita, Draupadi and Savitri.”**

Justification: Co-chair Honig recommended we offer an addition to the narrative giving examples of great women in Hinduism, which in the Hindu way of thinking includes the Goddesses. The function of a Goddess as Shakti or power reveals a unique, important and positive Hindu perspective on the feminine.

**3. Add after p. 265, line 711 (...and Ramanada) for 7<sup>th</sup> grade on notable women**

**“Students learn about other great women saints of this time, for example, Andal of Tamil Nadu and Lalleshwari of Kashmir, as well as later ruling queens such as Rani Lakshmibai and Rani Durgavati. Students also are informed of the Hindu matriarchal societies of Kerala and Meghalaya. “**

Justification: Same as for edit 2, inclusion of more great women for this historical time period.

**4. Deletion of p. 213, lines 862 to 874, 6<sup>th</sup> grade on caste**

**~~Existing: “Relations between classes came to be expressed in terms of ritual purity or impurity, higher classes being purer than lower ones. This class system became distinctive over the centuries for being especially complex and formal, involving numerous customs and prohibitions on eating together and intermarrying that kept social and occupational groups distinct from one another in daily life. Over the centuries, the Indian social structure became more rigid, though perhaps not more inflexible than the class divisions in other ancient civilizations. When Europeans began to visit India in modern times, they used the word “caste” to characterize the social system because of the sharp separation they perceived between groups who did not intermarry and thus did not mix with each other. Caste, however, is a term that social scientists use to describe any particularly unbending social structure, for example, slave-holding society in the American south before the Civil War, which can make the “caste” label offensive.~~**

Justification: We again vehemently object to the addition of this material which occurred at the meeting of Oct 8 and 9. The tendentious topic of caste is already sufficiently covered in the preceding paragraph. We would point out that despite the Commission’s attempt to uncouple varna/jati and Hinduism, the opening sentence with the terms “ritual purity or impurity” definitely puts a religious slant on the system. We’d also point out that the phrases “kept social and occupational groups distinct from one another in daily life” and “thus did not mix with each other” are misrepresentative of the actual situation. Obviously people of each jati interacted with the other jatis, how else would they get their food, their clothes, their furniture, their house built, their hair cut or their dead cremated? The system was a functional division of labor, not a complete separation of people from one another. It would have been more accurate to say just “kept social and occupational groups distinct from one another” and leave out “in daily life” and delete altogether “thus did not mix with each other.”

Our main issue is the inequitable stress here on social structure for India and Hinduism. We

have gone through the draft narrative and find that no mention is made of social hierarchy in the narrative's section, "Ancient Israelites," lines 569-629 or in the section, "Persia and the World of Islam," lines 444-669. For the section "Christendom," lines 166-442, social hierarchy is mentioned for medieval times in lines 388-395, but not in the context of religion.

We note that social hierarchy is described for Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, China, Rome, Japan, and Mayan society.

As we offered above for the place of women, consider the following perfectly accurate description of slavery in Christianity, which is typical of the Abrahamic religions:

*"Slavery, common in Jewish society, continued under the Christian religion, where slaves who converted to Christianity were instructed to submit themselves to their owner, even if he is harsh (as in 1 Peter 2:18), or be subject to punishment as instructed in Luke 12:47: 'And that slave who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.' Students discuss how even when Christians became the ruling religion, no effort was made to end the practice of slavery among them until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Christian justification of the practice continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century."*

Or alternatively, consider this paragraph from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on slavery covering all the Abrahamic religions at once (<http://www.britannica.com/topic/slavery-sociology/Slave-culture>):

*"The attitudes of the world's great religions toward slavery are of special interest. The Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition has been the most tolerant of slavery. Judaic and Islamic canonical texts refer frequently to slavery and treat it as a natural condition that might befall anyone. But they view it as a condition that should be gotten over quickly. Islamic practice was based on the assumption that the outsider rapidly became an insider and consequently had to be manumitted after six years. New Testament Christianity, on the other hand, had no prescriptions that slaves be manumitted. Canon law sanctioned slavery."*

One of the five books approved for 7th grade social studies in 2006, *Discovering Our Past, Medieval and Early Modern Times* published by Glencoe, contained this statement on slavery in Islam, which might also serve as a model for the narrative:

*Muslim Society: Muslim people were divided into social groups based on power and wealth. At the top were government leaders, landowners, and traders. Below them were artisans, farmers, and workers. The lowest group were enslaved people. As in other civilizations, slavery was widespread. Because Muslims could not be enslaved, traders brought enslaved people from non-Muslim areas. Many of these people were prisoners of war. (pages 192-3)*

This passage was not contested by the Muslim community during the 2005-2006 adoption process and no edit was made to it in the final list of edits of February 27, 2006 (hssnotice022706a1).

Our Hindu children are bullied by their classmates for the system of varna and jati—as testified to at the IQC meetings—because the social iniquities of other religions go unmentioned. This is unfair, and it was unjustified (at the Oct 8/9 meeting) for the section on caste to be expanded by hundreds of words, when not one word was added anywhere else in the narrative on social injustice in any other religion.

Social hierarchy is a natural consequence of social-economic stratification and is seen in every society to this day. If anything, the Indian jati system was more fair in that the lowest classes were not slaves, but independent, self-governing groups.

If the commission insists on keeping lines 862 to 874, it should add 300- to 400-word statements on social order and slavery for the Abrahamic religions. Alternatively, it should remove lines 862 to 874 as recommended above and add 100-word statements on social order and slavery for the other religions—an emphasis equal to the remaining paragraph on varna/jati (lines 850-861).

**5. add after p. 213, line 877 (...rather than a religious belief), on social reform**

**“Bhakti saints such as Ramananda (14th century), Kabir (15th century) and Chokhamela (14th century and himself an “Untouchable”) did not directly oppose the jati system, but preached that one’s jati is no barrier to the worship of God. Organized efforts to reform the system only began in the 19th century. Oddly enough, those efforts came about as a result of British attempts to take a census counting the number of people in each jati, as well as to rank the jatis according to their relative social status. This effort changed a system which was loose and fluid into one that was fixed and hierarchical. It also turned what was a community-level organization into political blocks vying for influence. With Indian Independence in 1947, discrimination on the basis of jati was outlawed.”**

Justification: Nicholas Dirks, now chancellor at UC Berkeley, has argued in his book, *Castes of Mind, Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, that Indian caste as we know it today is a “modern phenomenon,” as caste was “fundamentally transformed by British colonial rule.” According to Dirks, before colonialism caste affiliation was quite loose and fluid, but the British regime enforced caste affiliation rigorously, and constructed a much more strict hierarchy than existed previously. We would also point out that efforts to reform slavery in the West similarly began in earnest only in the 19th century, about the same time as the rise of democracy and the right to vote, which brought slavery into focus.

The Faculty Letter itself makes the same point on page 3 of its attached unpublished paper, *Biogenetic Data and Historical Scholarship: Sources of Evidence Regarding “Aryan Migration,”* Presented to The California State Board of Education Sacramento, Monday, February 27, 2006:

“While these [genetic] studies use scientific methods, there are many social and cultural assumptions embedded in them, including outdated understandings of the modern caste system that equate it with the Varna system of ancient India, that assume strong endogamy, or that view ‘castes’ as stable and easily identifiable. However, social scientists have demonstrated convincingly that caste in India is an ‘elastic’ system and that two castes that share the same name may have very different origins in different geographical regions. Studies of caste in one region are not easily extrapolated to others. What counts as an upper or middle or lower ‘caste’ group in one area may not translate into the same category in another.”